



# BLM NEWS



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## Lover of horses catches spirit of Wyoming mustangs

The wind whips through the steel-grey mane as his hooves thunder about the last barrel. Clods of soft earth fly in a spray as the horse finishes his turn, and with a nudge of his rider's feet, charges home. The rider smiles in anticipation – she can smell victory.

And not for one moment does Lona Patton forget that the muscles pounding beneath her saddle are those of a wild horse. He is her pride.

“I want to yell it to the world, ‘Hey, look, see how good he is!’ I’m sure people get tired of me telling them that my horse is a mustang,” exclaimed Patton, owner and friend of a prize-winning wild horse.

Metawa Wacipi Wi, a Wyoming mustang in only his second year of competition, took five ribbons - two of them blue - and a trophy on high point at a recent Deer Creek Horse Club Gymkana event in Glenrock, Wyo. In all, Metawa has won nine ribbons and rode in numerous parades.

The story of Metawa Wacipi Wi and Lona begins with a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wild horse adoption at Buffalo, Wyo., in May 1996, but Patton's love for mustangs finds its roots in her upbringing.

Patton's mother, Bobbi Young, raised her daughter around horses. Young, who served three years as Wyoming's representative for the American Mustang and Burro Association, saw horses as an opportunity to instill patience and a loving respect for animals into her daughter.

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“My horses have always been my best friends and confidants. Horses have just been a part of my life,” explained Patton, a homemaker in Evansville, Wyo. She added, “I guess I could ride before I could walk.”

After purchasing land in 1994, Patton began to realize a life-long dream of owning a mustang.

“I had grown up on them, and all of a sudden found myself without horses. I felt pretty lost,” said Patton.

Patton and three of her five children traveled to Buffalo to take part in a BLM lottery-style adoption on May 18, 1996. The BLM began its Adopt-a-Horse program in 1973 as part of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act passed by Congress in 1971. The Act forms part of BLM’s overall efforts to maintain the ecological balance of public lands. Wild horses are sturdy animals with no natural predators. Left to themselves, the horses would reproduce to the point that the natural resources of the lands they inhabit would be depleted. This would cause harm not only to the wild horses, but other native species and range animals as well. So BLM tries to maintain appropriate numbers of wild horses on public lands, gathering excess animals for adoptions.

After examining the 80 horses at the adoption, Patton created a list of her favorite ten.

“I didn’t know if I’d even get a chance. Out of 80 horses, I drew number 99. I was ready to give up and cry.” Patton credits a good portion of her success with her wild horse to her faith in God. “I sat down and prayed right then, ‘Lord, if this is meant to be, I promise to give this horse a good home. Let there be a horse for me.’”

“Afterwards, I realized there was only about 35 people there, so number 99 wasn’t as scary after all,” added Patton, laughing.

One by one, however, Patton watched as other adopters chose her favorite horses. Only her tenth choice remained when her turn came. She quickly chose him. After looking the horse over again, though, Patton realized he was a little too big and more than she could safely handle with her children.

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Heartbroken, she told BLM personnel that she couldn't take the horse. They encouraged her to take another look at the pen as a few horses had been turned back by adopters for being too small. There in the corrals stood her fifth choice, Metawa. It was a match that only heaven could make.

Patton explained Metawa's unique name. "When I first saw Metawa, he was a deep, steel grey with a crescent moon and a tiny, little star next to it. So I came up with the name Moondancer."

Patton felt the name was too common and desired something that conveyed a sense of the mustangs' heritage. Having recently studied the Lakota language, she took the name "Moon Dancer Mine" and translated it into Lakota or "Metawa Wacipi Wi." For short, she simply calls him "mine" or "Metawa."

Since taking Metawa home, Patton has become a staunch defender of the wild horse, the adoption process and the wild horse's capabilities. She regularly takes Metawa to show and tell days at Evansville Elementary, talks to children and adults alike when out riding her horse, and has even written several letters to the editor of her local newspaper.

"There for a while, there were a lot of letters to the editor talking about how people were adopting horses to make money at the slaughter houses. I had to scream out, 'We're not all that way.' Many of these horses go to good homes, homes that plan to keep them for many, many years until their last breath. I just wanted people to know," said Patton.

Her relationship with Metawa has not been without effort, though.

"It's had its ups and downs. We ran into a few brick walls, but nothing that stopped us. All the brick walls that I've run up against have not been his problem. They've been my problem of not understanding how to train him in a situation." Patton would turn to books, videos and other horse experts to solve difficult situations. "We've managed to overcome every one of them. Some took longer than others did. He's been my teacher every bit as much as I've been his. Mostly he's taught me to be patient."

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That forms the crux of Patton's message: time, patience, and understanding. In other words, bonding.

"The mustang doesn't need to be feared just because he's a mustang. He's a horse. You can have good ones and you can have those who haven't learned yet. I believe precaution is the best medicine. But that doesn't mean you can't do it at all." Patton went on to explain, "Give time to build that bond – the horse has to bond with you. That's the first step. You can force them and they'll do it. Or you can step out there with Metawa, and he'll come to you and want to do it. That's the difference. Once you get their trust, they'll follow you till the ends of the earth."

In turn, Metawa has become the teacher for Patton's children as well. She describes one of her proudest moments as seeing her daughter ride Metawa and being able to trust both horse and daughter.

"She was cautious about us going around the horse and stuff. There were lots of rules and we all had to learn about the safety rules for riding horses before we could ride them," said Jennifer Sloyer, Patton's thirteen year-old daughter. She has learned her mother's and grandmother's love of horses. Of her first solo-riding experience with Metawa, Sloyer said, "He behaved very well. I didn't go very far, but it was an experience for me. It was very peaceful."

Young expressed her approval of both Patton and Sloyer. "I'm very proud of the way my daughter has done with her mustang. Her thirteen year-old daughter is becoming the same way – the patience, the learning. She's even starting to train her own pony."

As for Metawa and Patton, they will continue competing in barrel racing and keyhole events as well as horse shows. Along the way with every opportunity horse and rider sees, they will stop to take a moment and teach those around them the beauty, strength and heritage of the wild horse.

"He never ceases to amaze me. Everyday is a memorable event. Everything with him has been a positive."



Jennifer Sloyer, Lona Patton's thirteen year-old daughter, describes riding Metawa as a "peaceful" experience.

This Wyoming mustang adopted in Buffalo gets his name, "Metawa Wacipi Wi," from the Lakota Indian's language, which stands for "Moon Dancer Mine."

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Metawa and Lona Patton approach the last barrel in a practice run. Metawa has won nine ribbons in various gymkana horse events.



Lona Patton has realized her dreams of owning a Wyoming mustang by adopting a prize-winning horse, Metawa Wacipi Wi.